July 15, 2014
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Native Species Coordinator - Fisheries
Missoula Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Lewis & Clark Conservation District, 790 Colleen Street, Helena, MT 59601
Montana River Action, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 1, Ovando, MT 59854
Rick and Mary Sampson, P.O. Box 32, Dagmar, MT 59219

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project on Keep Cool Creek that would improve migration corridors for trout populations during high flow periods and restore the impaired channel to its natural state. The project involves removal of an undersized stream crossing and replacement with a structure that will allow for habitat improvement and uninhibited movement of trout. Keep Cool Creek is a tributary to the upper Blackfoot River located north of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., August 18, 2014 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Keep Cool Creek Fish Passage Improvement

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized stream crossing on Keep Cool Creek with a structure that allows for fish passage and returns the channel to its natural state. The intent of the project is to improve corridors for trout migration, restore the channel, and improve stream habitat.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located on Keep Cool Creek, a tributary to the upper Blackfoot River, within Township 14 North, Range 9 West, Section 13 in Lewis and Clark County, located slightly north of the town of Lincoln (Attachment 1).

II. Need for the Project:

FWP's six-year operations plan for the fisheries program includes the following goals:

- Restore and enhance degraded aquatic habitats.
- Protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species and ensure angling opportunities whenever possible.

This project is expected to enhance aquatic habitat that has been impacted by an undersized stream crossing. Increased connectivity could boost populations of wild trout species, potentially including native trout, as bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout are present in this drainage but are limited in distribution.

III. Scope of the Project:

An existing set of paired, undersized culverts (Attachment 2) located near stream mile 3.0 would be removed and replaced with a timber bridge. The bridge was designed using stream simulation principles and would improve natural channel conditions and floodplain function, as well as allow for uninhibited aquatic organism passage. The hydraulic capacity of the new structure would accommodate a 100-year flood event and allows for an estimated 15 foot bankfull width

(Attachment 3). The total estimated cost for this project is $28,222. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to $8,500. The remaining funds will come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service		$5,000
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited	$2,932	$11,790
TOTAL = $19,722		

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Potential Impacts on the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life habitats.

This project would involve the removal of an undersized culvert that has degraded fish habitat and impeded fish passage during high flow periods. The culvert would be replaced with a timber bridge that will allow for passage of aquatic organisms and accommodate natural channel conditions. Construction impacts would be short term; long-term impacts to aquatic life will be positive, as stream connectivity is expected to be restored, and aquatic and riparian habitat quality should be improved, benefiting brown trout and potentially westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout (if their distribution continues to expand).

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

No changes in drainage pattern or natural surface run-off would occur in Keep Cool Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization). A 310 permit (Montana Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be contacted for requirements to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted during construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, the proposed project would enhance aesthetics in Keep Cool Creek by removing the pair of undersized culverts and installing a timber crossing. The channel would be returned a more natural state and function.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

This stream section is dominated by brown trout. However, westslope cutthroat trout are present in tributaries and bull trout are present in the lower spring creek. Benefits to native trout are anticipated, as restoration work is focused on increased habitat and connectivity.

9. Historical and archeological sites.

The project site has been disturbed previously by other projects involving road crossing construction and culvert replacement. No historical or archaeological sites have been identified. If cultural materials are inadvertently discovered during the project, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted, and the site will be investigated.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

13. Locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

This proposed project expands on restoration work completed on the ranch property and is linked to a larger plan to improve habitat for wild trout in Keep Cool Creek.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, the applicant would have to either seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the existing undersized stream crossing would remain in place, impeding movement at high streamflow.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to replace the undersized stream crossing with a timber bridge, large enough to accommodate a 100-year flood. Connectivity would be restored to this section of Keep Cool Creek.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

2. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for

public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. One letter of support was submitted with the application. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: **www.fwp.mt.gov**

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on August 18, 2014.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2432

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title: Keep Cool Creek Fish Passage Improvement
Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)
Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized stream crossing on Keep Cool Creek with a structure that allows for passage and returns the channel to its natural state. The intent of the project is to improve migration corridors for trout migration, restore the channel, and improve stream habitat.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites			X			X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities				X		
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals			X			X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

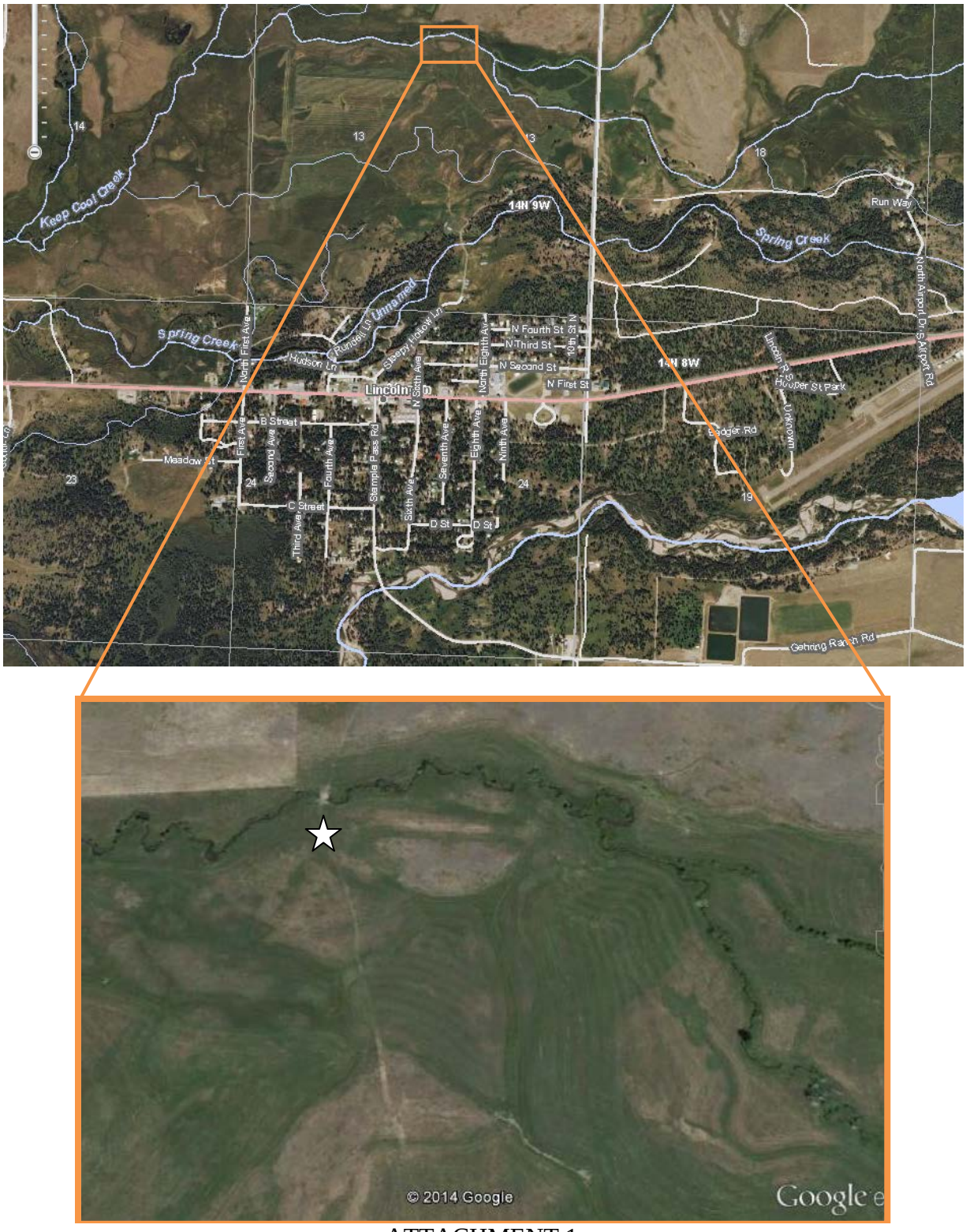
Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction: Lewis & Clark Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, GreatWest Engineering

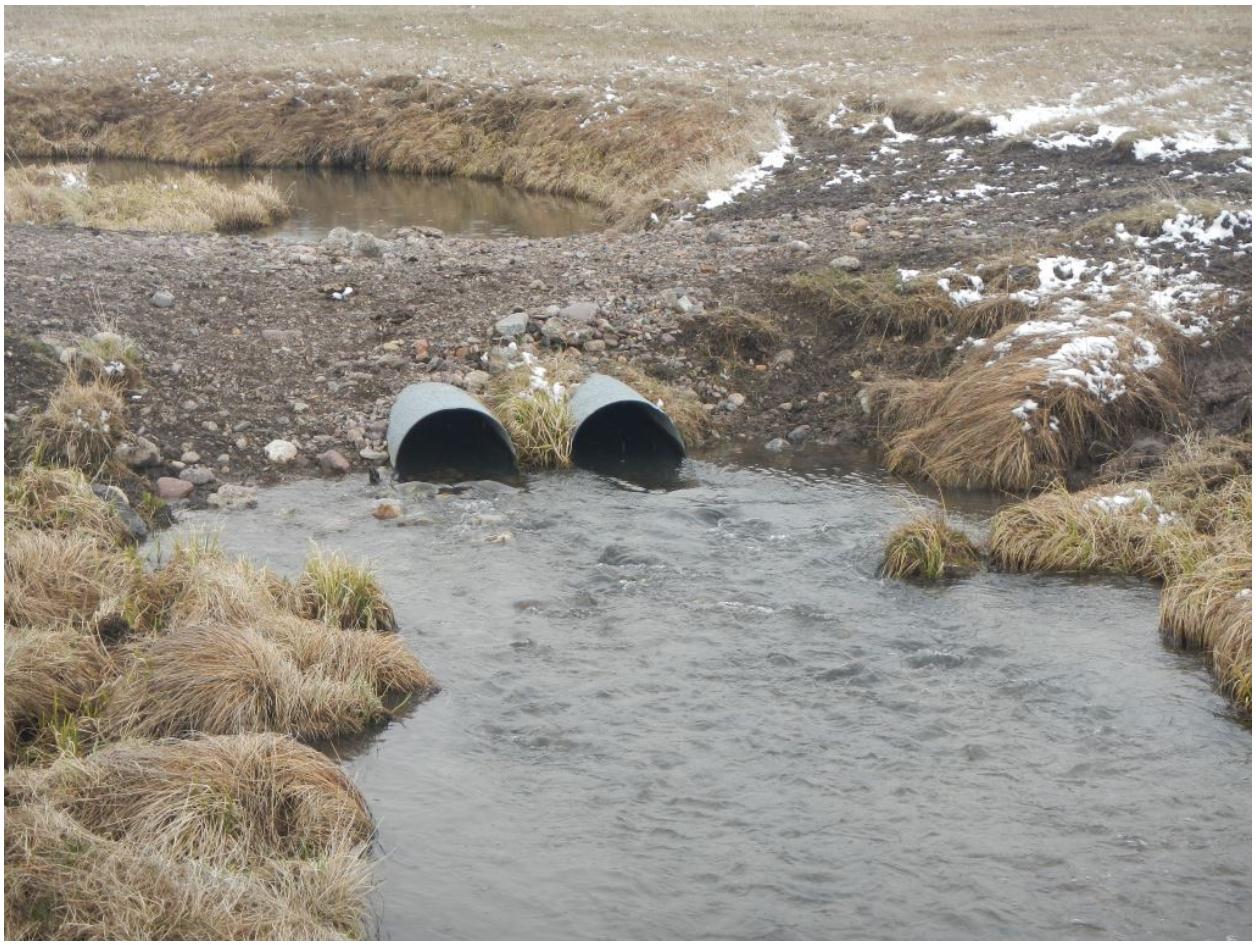
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Michelle McGree

Date: July 15, 2014



ATTACHMENT 1



ATTACHMENT 2

ATTACHMENT 3